



# State of Connecticut Council on Developmental Services



February 24, 2022

## **H.B. 05037 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023 - (Department of Developmental Services)**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Karen Hlavac, Vice Chair of the Council On Developmental Services, and I am providing this testimony on behalf of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the state budget.

The Council has taken the time to review the Governor's proposed budget for the biennium ending June 30, 2023 and recommends an increase to the amount allocated to the Department of Developmental Services to stabilize and recover from the ongoing pandemic.

The Council is particularly concerned about the need to recruit and retain staff to ensure the continuation of services utilized by individuals and families served by the department. Over the past two years, staff have been referred to as "heroes", often risking their lives to maintain continuity of services, while ensuring the health and safety of the individuals supported by the DDS. We as a council could not agree more.

While the Council is grateful for the support provided in the last biennium budget, we are concerned about the on going staffing crisis among Direct Support Professionals (DSP's) due to low wages, and pandemic burnout. Unfortunately, the financial support provided in the last budget has eroded due to inflation. The industry is also facing a fierce, competitive job market with employers offering higher salaries for jobs that require less skills and responsibility. The Council urges you to address this situation by ensuring fair and equitable wages.

In addition, the Council is concerned about the ongoing nursing shortage facing both the public and private sectors. Nurses, who are critical to the health and safety needs of the individuals supported by DDS, have been lost to aggressive recruitment by area hospitals and other healthcare facilities. The Council suggests that resources be allocated for DDS to develop a career development pipeline as a step to address this shortage.

Finally, we understand that the state is facing a mental health crisis as individuals recover and adapt from the pandemic. We urge the legislature to include individuals with intellectual disabilities as part of this important discussion when determining how to best utilize state and federal funding resources. Not only will staffing and nursing be a critical component to addressing the mental health needs, but the allocation of additional funds via the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 will be essential to innovate and invigorate services.

In conclusion, we respectfully request the appropriations committee allocate additional funds above the Governor's proposed budget to overcome these obstacles. The Council thanks you in advance for your consideration and your ongoing support.

### *The DDS Council on Developmental Services Members:*

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